

Plan picked for El Toro Road

Lake Forest City Council decides to add fourth lane both ways from I-5 east about a mile.

By JIM RADCLIFFE and RITA FREEMAN

LAKE FOREST – A stretch of El Toro Road originally built in the last days of the horseless carriage will soon get modern-day help.

The City Council picked a \$26.8 million blueprint Tuesday night to uncork a bottlenecked section of El Toro that has endured swelling traffic created by nearby master-planned communities.

On a 5-0 vote, the council decided to add a fourth lane in each direction from the San Diego (I-5) Freeway east about one mile to Jutewood Place - a decongestant meant to reduce bumper-to-bumper driving and bring back motorists who avoid the jam. "People (shun) El Toro Road now, and that has to change," Councilman Peter Herzog said. "There's no question that this road has to improve."

The council picked from three alternatives, with price tags ranging from \$16.8 million to \$37.7 million.

Besides adding lanes and turn pockets, the plan adds a 26-foot-wide median and meandering, landscaped sidewalks on each side of El Toro.

The road - which acts as Lake Forest's Main Street and provides an east-west route for many south Orange County residents - is lined with aging strip malls.

The state and county have provided \$17.1 million for the project. The city will pick up the rest.

The decision ends decades of debate on the best way to free up the roadway, including a 1991 proposal to create a river and river walkway similar to the one in San Antonio.

Construction is set to begin in a year and should be completed a year later. Several of the 30 spectators told the council that closing the left-turn pocket from El Toro Road to Swartz Road will hurt their businesses. "We need an outlet for our customers," said Cindy Rupp, a manager at Wallpapers To Go.